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Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood Reaffirms Commitment to Combat Distracted Driving

WASHINGTON - At an event marking the one-year anniversary of FocusDriven, the first national nonprofit organization dedicated to advocating for victims of distracted driving, U.S. Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood today reaffirmed his commitment to putting an end to the deadly epidemic of distracted driving.

Joined by family members of distracted driving victims, including FocusDriven President Jennifer Smith, and representatives from Safeway and the Network of Employers for Traffic Safety (NETS), Secretary LaHood unveiled a number of new public education initiatives and discussed the important leadership role businesses play in promoting safe driving behavior.

"Distracted driving is a deadly epidemic and when it comes to road safety, we will not take a backseat to anyone," said Secretary LaHood. "That's why distracted driving will continue to be a major part of DOT's robust safety agenda. Together with advocates like FocusDriven and NETS, and employers like Safeway, we can put an end to this deadly behavior and save lives."

To show the devastating, real-life effect of distracted driving, the Department unveiled the latest in its "Faces of Distracted Driving" video series, which explores the tragic consequences of texting and cell phone use while driving. The video features people from across the country who have been injured or lost loved ones in distracted driving crashes. This week's video features 17-year-old Emily Reynolds. Emily's older sister Cady was killed in 2007 when a teen driver texting on her cell phone struck Cady's car in Omaha, Nebraska. To watch, or find out how to submit a video, visit:

www.distraction.gov/faces.

Also at today's event, FocusDriven President Jennifer Smith launched a new anti-distracted driving PSA. Titled the "5500 campaign," the 30-second public service announcement includes pictures of hundreds of distracted driving victims, putting faces to the fatalities that occur on American roadways.

“In our new PSA, we want to remind people that each and every distracted driving fatality is someone’s loved one, and that person’s family is in tremendous pain,” said Smith. “Our new campaign will urge the public to put down the phone and focus on the drive. We cannot wait until others are killed or injured to take action. The statistics show that it’s no longer ‘if’ someone you know will be affected by distracted driving, it’s ‘when.’”

On the employer side, Shannon Campagna, Vice President of Federal Government Relations for Safeway grocery stores, spoke about the company’s decision to institute an anti-distracted driving policy for all Safeway truck drivers. The policy prohibits Safeway’s 1,525 truck drivers from talking or texting on cell phones, or from using hands-free devices while driving.

“The safety of our employees, customers and residents in the communities where we operate is and always has been of the utmost importance to Safeway,” said Campagna. “This policy not only helps keep our employees and customers safe, but we believe it is a good business practice as it ensures that our products arrive safely and on-time. Implementation of policies limiting use of phones and mobile devices by more private companies will help minimize distractions for drivers and keep Americans on the road safe and healthy.”

Bill Windsor, Chairman of the Network of Employers for Traffic Safety (NETS), also announced the results of their 2010 Drive Safely Work Week (DSWW) campaign. The campaign, which promoted anti-distracted driving employer policies, reached a record-breaking 5,000 unique public and private organizations representing **more than 20 million U.S. employees**. Of the 4,690 unique organizations that downloaded the NETS electronic tool kit, 88 percent currently have or expect to have a cell phone policy in place within the next 12 months.

“Employers can make a real difference in keeping their associates safe both on and off the job by educating them about the dangers of distracted driving and adopting policies to prevent it,” said Windsor.

While public awareness about America’s distracted driving epidemic has grown in recent years, the problem still looms large. In 2009, nearly 5,500 people died and half a million were injured in accidents involving a distracted driver.

To learn more about the U.S. Department of Transportation’s efforts to stop distracted driving, please visit www.distraction.gov.

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